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ABSTRACT

Based on a review of the literature, procedures worked out at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, and on insights gained working with personnel at several institutions in the formulation of goals and objectives, this report delineates procedures for goal-setting, and describes how the needs of community colleges differ from those of other types of postsecondary institutions. Specific definitions and examples are given for each of the following terms: "mission," "goals," "objectives," "priorities," "role," and "scope." Basically, this document emphasizes the need for concrete guidelines and alternative strategies for deciding about goals and especially for translating these general goals into specific objectives. A necessary first step is the identification of a limited number of goals that serve to define the broad mission statement of the institution. For the goal-setting process, this document recommends a modified Delphi-technique which involves discussion of the institution's mission statement and of the results of a needs assessment survey. Personnel on all levels of the institutional hierarchy participate in this discussion, and suggest priorities for the goals. After the list of prioritized goals has been resubmitted to the same population, the Delphi procedure is repeated to prioritize objectives. (NHM)

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DEFINING AND COMMUNICATING INSTITUTIONAL MISSION/ ROLE/SCOPE AND PRIORITIES: THE NEEDS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS*

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During the past few years, postsecondary institutions have been faced with increased pressures to better define "what they are all about," and to better communicate their purposes and goals to many different audiences. The community colleges of our country have also faced such pressures, and many institutions have not been as successful as desired in attacking the problems of explicitly defining and stating their purposes and goals. Therefore, they would like guidance in this area, as indicated in the survey where members of the AERA Special Interest Group on Community/Junior College Research indicated special interest in hearing papers at this convention on goal setting. The topic of this paper is on procedures for goal-setting, and on how the needs at community colleges are different from those at other types of postsecondary education institutions. This preliminary report is based on a review of the literature, on procedures worked out at NCHEMS and on the insights gained working with personnel at several institutions (including one community college) in the formulation and expression of their goals and objectives. We are currently seeking funding for a more extensive try-out of the procedures to be discussed here.

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The importance of clearly defining and communicating an organization's goals has been underscored by various organizational theorists (e.g., March and Simon, 1958; Selznick, 1960; Etzioni, 1964; Perrow, 1970; Kast, Rosenzweig, and Johnson, 1971). Thus Perrow (1970), when speaking of institutional character (a term which was initially coined by Selznick [1957]), stated the following:

> I have paid so much attention, and devoted so many pages, to the neglected area of goals because I believe they provide a key, not found elsewhere, to an organization's 'character,' and thus to its behavior .... Goals, in this sense, are necessary for concerted effort. It is possible for an organization to lack important goals, or to lack a distinctive character. Without firm goals, such organizations are subject to vagrant pressures from within and without, even as they may grow and prosper. There is, of course, a direction of effort, but it may be changeable, vulnerable, and not firmly anchored in the organizational structure. While this gives the organization flexibility, it also provides few resources for unusual effort of a concerted kind. Organizations are tools; system, product, and derived goals shape the form of the tool, indicating for what it can or cannot be used. An organization with weakly held goals is a poor tool for accomplishing ends, so that it may be shaped by opportunistic forces in the environment. Thus, goals represent a positive resource to organizations [pp. 171-173].

In a recent essay on university goals, Conrad (1974) points out that goals: (1) are standards against which to judge success, (2) provide a source of legitimacy which justify the activities of an organization, (3) define organizational needs and priorities, (4) define production units for "outputs" for the organization, (5) define the organization's clientele, and (6) define the nature of the relationship between the organization and society. He also points out that "in most universities, goals are often implicit, residing in an extended body of collective understandings rather than in explicit statements." He goes on to say, "If university goals are to serve the purposes listed above, they must be identified more precisely."

The goals of specific colleges and universities have traditionally been described in broad, vague, "high sounding," and often internally inconsistent terms. Such a

situation did not cause any major problems as long as people fully accepted the intrinsic value of a college education and as long as the demands made on post-secondary education institutions remained relatively stable. However, during the fifties and sixties, postsecondary educational institutions, in particular those in the collegiate sector, came under increasingly severe pressure to grow in size and complexity (pressure readily acceded to by many officials) and to meet the diverse needs, desires, and expectations of many new groups throughout society. In response to those voluminous and diverse demands being made on them, institutions often found themselves trying to become "everything to everybody." They were indeed swayed by opportunistic forces in the environment. In the process, colleges and universities of all types grew increasingly alike; they increasingly lost their individual identities as they pursued an ideal typified by the university model. As a result, the purposes, goals, objectives, and priorities of specific institutions have not been very distinct, nor very apparent to even their students, faculty, and administrators. Although they have often been more distinct in their statements of mission than have other institutions, the same problems have been apparent at community colleges. One result of this is that the so-called "community college philosophy" has often not been very well understood by those outside of the movement who have heard it expounded.

Before discussing procedures in goal-setting, it will be helpful to talk about and define, for purposes of this paper, six terms. Examples of each term are given in Figure 1, and the definitions follow:

1. Mission - The statement of "mission" for an institution or organization is a statement of its enduring purpose or aspiration. As such, it serves only to describe the most general focus or direction. By virtue of the sweeping and typical generality of mission statements, they tend to be very similar for institutions of the same general type and even across types.

3. Goals - The "goals" for an institution represent particular ends in pursuit of its mission. Goals are still stated in relatively broad, qualitative terms, but they are more specific than a mission statement.

4. Objectives - "Objectives" are specific ends to be achieved which respond to a particular goal. Objectives are stated in quantitative or time set, more detailed, concrete intent and process that courses of activities will be undertaken to attain them. It is at this point that true identification and assessing what is meant by a mission or goal is achieved.

5. Priorities - "Priorities" is a term used to reflect the relative importance of the institution's goals and objectives. Since goals or set objectives are not necessarily of equal importance, some statement of what is most important, what is second in importance, etc. must be forthcoming if an institution is to operate so as to maximize the value of the achievement of its objectives.

6. Role - "Role" refers to the specific part one institution will play relative to the mission, goals, objectives and priorities of broader institutions and of a larger organization or larger need (e.g., the postsecondary education system in a state). Because the concept of role is one which to focuses institutions (and their funders) to identify their place in the larger educational community, it tends to be an item of much debate and concern. It is the issue that is more and more forcing institutions to search further ways to express their unique characteristics. As shown in Figure 1, roles can be established or identified for institutions on a variety of dimensions, e.g., programs offered, clients served, outcomes sought, and methods applied. Some people would

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their goals, an inability to state them in specific, measurable objective terms hinders (if not precludes) them from gaining the benefits of such statements. Neither can they adequately assess the progress of their programs to determine the extent to which goals have been achieved, nor successfully communicate to constitutents external to the institution sufficiently specific information to be of use to those groups (e.g., information that would allow a prospective student to ascertain whether or not his individual objectives could be met at the institution).

For each of the outcome goals (variables) in the NCHEMS Inventory of Higher Education Outcome Variables and Measures, a number of potential, quantifiable measures have been outlined. Others may be added if they are available and considered desirable. Criteria of relevance, reliability, validity, and ease of administration were used in deciding what measures were to be included in the inventory. These same concerns should be addressed for the particular campus setting, however. For example, will the measure have meaning, and be considered representative of the outcome being measured, by those who will be using the data to make planning and management decisions. Can the needed and proper data be readily obtained? How costly and time consuming will it be to implement the measure?

The next step in translating the goals to objectives, once the committee has decided on the measures appropriate for each goal, is to decide on the level of attainment on the goal that is desirable and that should be expected. Decisions about level can be based on logical reason, on past results in the context of the current situation, on the performance of other comparable institutions or

programs, and/or on some standard that has been determined by legislative mandate, a professional association, some agency, research results, etc. (For example, a learning objective might be that 85 percent of the students will pass a particular exam.) The objectives for each goal should now be listed in priority order utilizing similar prioritizing criteria for these decisions as were proposed for prioritizing goals.

Once the committee has made tentative decisions about the goals, goal priorities, objectives, and objective priorities for each outcome goal, the list should be circulated to the departments for reactions. Then, as such feedback is considered, the institution's goals and objectives should be finalized. Next, each institutional department can go through a similar process to determine its goals and objectives supportive of the institution's goals and objectives, and those goals and objectives necessary to meet its own added agenda of needs (assuming they do not conflict with the institution's mission).

An additional need is for integrating the specific statements of goals and objectives into the on-going planning, management, and evaluation processes of the institution and its components. If not so integrated any statement of goals and objectives becomes a sterile exercise. To be useful and meaningful it is necessary to make them a focal point for decisions and actions geared toward achieving those objectives (towards decisions about process goals). Resources must be allocated in such a way that achievement of those objectives is promoted. Furthermore, evaluation of an institution's progress can be accomplished only against the yardstick provided by its statements of what it intended to do.

Based on our experiences thus far, it would seem that the goal setting procedures outlined here will work as well at community colleges as at other postsecondary institutions. Some factors will probably be different, however. Some of the lists of goals mentioned (e.g., ETS' Instutional Goals Inventory) are more inclusive of university goals than of community college goals, which means that community colleges will probably have to add more goals of their own. Conversely, universities usually have more administrative levels, which complicates their consensus-seeking efforts. These are illustrative of the differences between community colleges and other institutions that will affect the goal-setting process. Factors that vary from institution to institution will also have important effects on the process. For example, certain administrative styles prevalent on a campus may not be amenable to the iterative method of goal setting outlined here. The numeration and evaluation of such constraints awaits the results of additional investigation.

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